

A Message from Governor Haley Barbour

Another in a series of one-page updates on major issues: Early Childhood Education

Governor Barbour believes a child's parents are the first and most important teachers in the child's life. Parents need information to help them understand the ages and stages of early childhood development and its connection to life-long learning.

Mississippi has about 1,700 licensed early care and education programs, and 80 percent of four-year-olds are already in some sort of child care program. The key is to make existing programs better so our kids will be ready to learn.

Last week, at the third summit he has sponsored on early childhood education, Governor Barbour reiterated that our goal is to provide high-quality services in existing early care and education programs serving pregnant women, children from birth to around age 8 and to provide parents with information and resources they need to raise healthy, happy and inquisitive children who are prepared to succeed in life.

The basic idea is to offer new initiatives to help parents and grandparents raise children who are ready to learn upon school entry. These initiatives would set criteria defining what types of services are high quality, provide a system to license day care facilities and then reward licensed early care and education programs that meet the criteria.

While the Legislature has not approved funding for the following initiatives, they remain high on Governor Barbour's agenda:

- **Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral System**

Provides parents with information and resources regarding early childhood development and its importance, as well as information on how to choose quality early care and education programs for their children.

- **Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System**

This system focuses on the state's early learning standards for three and four year old children and classroom quality, along with promoting professional development for teachers beyond what is currently required. It would provide a Quality Rating System to access, improve and communicate the level of quality in licensed child care and education settings across the state. A pilot project was implemented in Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott and Smith counties in 2006-2007.

- **Early Learning Collaboration Grant Program**

Allow schools, Head Start and public, private and faith-based early care and education programs meeting grant criteria and standards to apply for funds to enhance current programs or create new learning opportunities for four-year-old children. The emphasis would be on a program's educational content, particularly reading, and how it helps very young students begin to learn how to learn.

